

A Man for the Ages

A Story of the Builders of Democracy

By Irving Bacheller

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Samson and Sarah Traylor, with their two children, Josiah and Betsy, travel by wagon from their home in Vergennes, Vt., to the West, the land of plenty. Their destination is the Country of the Sangamon, in Illinois.

CHAPTER II.—At Niagara Falls they meet a party of immigrants, among them a youth named John McNell, who also decides to go to the Sangamon country. All of the party suffer from fever and ague. Sarah's ministrations save the life of a youth, Harry Needles, in the last stages of fever, and he accompanies the Traylor. They reach New Salem, Illinois, and are welcomed by young "Abe" Lincoln.

CHAPTER III.—Among the Traylor's first acquaintances are Lincoln's friends, Jack Kelo and his pretty daughter Bim, 16 years of age.

CHAPTER IV.—Samson decides to locate at New Salem, and begins building his house. Led by Jack Armstrong, rowdies attempt to break up the proceedings. Lincoln thrashes Armstrong. Young Harry Needles strikes Bap McNell, of the Armstrong crowd, and McNell threatens vengeance.

CHAPTER V.—A few days later Harry, alone, is attacked by McNell and his gang, and would have been roughly used had not Bim driven off his assailants with a shotgun. John McNell, the Traylor's Niagara Falls acquaintance, is markedly attentive to Ann Rutledge. Lincoln is in love with Ann but has never had enough courage to tell her so.

CHAPTER VI.—Traylor helps two slaves, who had run away from St. Louis, to escape. Eliphaz Biggs, owner of the slaves, following them, attempts to beat up Traylor and in a fight has his arm broken.

CHAPTER VII.—Waiting for his arm to heal, Biggs meets Bim Kelo, with whom Harry Needles has fallen in love. Biggs asks for Bim's hand, but her father refuses his consent. Biggs returns to St. Louis.

CHAPTER VIII.—Bim confesses to Harry that she loves Biggs, and the youth is discomfited. Lincoln decides to seek a seat in the legislature. He and Harry volunteer for the Black Hawk war, and leave New Salem.

CHAPTER IX.—Biggs comes back to the village and he and Bim elope. Harry learns of it on his way home from the "war." Lincoln's advice and philosophy sustain him in his grief.

BOOK TWO.

CHAPTER X.

In Which Abe and Samson Wrestle and Some Raiders Come to Burn and Stay to Repent.

Within a week after their return the election came off and Abe was defeated, although in his precinct two hundred and twenty-seven out of a total of three hundred votes had been cast for him. He began to consider which way to turn. Maj. John T. Stuart, a lawyer of Springfield—who had been his comrade in the "war"—had encouraged him to study law and, further, had offered to lend him books. So he looked for an occupation which would give him leisure for study. Outfit, his former employer, had failed and cleared out. The young giant regarded thoughtfully the scanty opportunities of the village. He could hurl his great strength into the axhead and make a good living, but he had learned that such a use of it gave him a better appetite for sleep than study.

John McNell, who for a short time had shared his military adventures, had become a partner of Samuel Hill in a store larger and better stocked than any the village had known. But Hill and McNell had no need of a clerk. Roman Herndon and William Berry had opened a general store. Mr. Herndon offered to sell his interest to Abe and take notes for his pay. It was not a proposition that promised anything but loss. The community was small and there were three other stores, and there was no other "Bill" Berry, who was given to drink and dreams, as Abe knew.

Abe Lincoln had not been trained to weigh the consequences of a business enterprise. The store would give him leisure for study and New Salem could offer him nothing else save consuming toll with the ax or the saw. He could not think of leaving the little cabin village. There were Ann Rutledge and Jack Kelo and Samson Traylor and Harry Needles. Every ladder climber in the village and on the plain around it was his friend.

Upon these people who knew and respected him Abe Lincoln based his hopes. Among them he had found his vision and failure had not diminished or dimmed it. He would try again for a place in which he could serve them and if he could learn to serve Sangamon county he could learn to serve the state and, possibly, even the republic. With this thought and a rather poor regard for his own interest his name fell into bad company on the signboard of Berry and Lincoln. Before he took his place in the store he walked to Springfield and borrowed a law book from his friend Major Stuart.

The career of the firm began on a hot day late in August with Bill Berry smoking his pipe in a chair on the little veranda of the store and Abe Lincoln sprawled in the shade of a tree that partly overhung its roof, reading a law book. The face of Mr. Berry suddenly assumed a look of animation. A small, yellow dog which had been lying in repose beside him rose and growled, his hair rising, and with a little cry of alarm and astonishment fled under the store.

"Here comes Steve Nuckles on his old mare with a lion following him,"



"Here Comes Steve Nuckles on His Old Mare."

said Berry. "If we ain't careful we'll git prayed for plenty."

"If the customers don't come faster I reckon we'll need it," said Abe.

"Howdy," said the minister as he stopped at the hitching bar, dismounted and tied his mare. "Don't be skeered o' this 'ere dog. He were tied when I left home but he clawed his rope an' come a'ter me. I reckon if nobody feeds him he'll patter back to-night. Any plug tobacco?"

"A backload of it," said Berry, going into the store to wait on the minister.

When they came out the latter carved off a corner of the plug with his jack-knife, put it into his mouth and sat down on the doorstep.

"Where do Samson Traylor live?" Abe took him to the road and pointed the way.

"There be goin' to be a raid," said Nuckles. "I reckon, by all I've heard, it'll come on tonight."

"A raid! Who's going to be raided?" Abe asked.

"Them Traylor folks. Thar be a St. Louis man, name o' Biggs, done stirred up the folks from Missouri and Tennessee on the south road 'bout the Yankee who helps the niggers out o' bondage. They be goin' to do some regulatin' tonight. Ol Satan'll break loose. Ef you don't wa'ch out they'll come over an' burn his house sartin'."

"We'll watch out," said Abe. "They don't know Traylor. He's one of the best men in this county."

"I've heered he were a he man an' a right powerful, God-fearin' man," said the minister.

"He's one of the best men that ever came to this country and any one that wants to try his strength is welcome to; I don't," said Abe. "Are you going over there?"

"I were goin' to warn 'em an' help 'em ef I caln."

"Well, go on, but don't stir 'em up," Abe cautioned him. "Don't say a word about the raid. I'll be over there with some other fellers soon after sundown. We'll just tell 'em it's a he party come over for a story-tellin' an' a raffle. I reckon we'll have some fun. Ride on over and take supper with 'em. They're worth knowin'."

In a few minutes the minister mounted his horse and rode away followed by his big dog.

"If I was you I wouldn't go," said Berry.

"Why not?"

"It'll hurt trade. Let the rest of Traylor's friends go over. There's enough of 'em."

"We must all stand as one man for law and order," said Abe. "If we don't there won't be any."

As soon as Abe had had his supper he went from house to house and asked the men to come to his store for a piece of important business. When they had come he told them what was in the wind. Soon after that hour Abe and Philemon Morris, and Alexander Ferguson, and Martin Waddell and Robert Johnson and Joshua Miller and Jack Kelo and Samuel Hill and John McNell set out for the Traylor cabin. Samson greeted the party with a look of surprise.

"Have you come out to hang me?" he asked.

"No just to hang around ye," said Abe.

"This time it's a heart warmin'," Jack Kelo averred. "We left our wives at home so that we could pay our compliments to Mrs. Traylor without reserve, knowing you to be a man above jealousy."

"It's what we call a he party, on the prairies," said Ferguson. "For one thing I wanted to see Abe and the minister have a raffle."

The Reverend Stephen Nuckles stood in front of the door with Sarah and Harry and the children. He was a famous wrestler.

"I can't raffle like I used to could, but I be willin' to give ye a try, Abe," said the minister.

"You'd better save your strength for ol Satan," said Abe.

"Go on, Abe," the others urged. "Give him a try."

Abe modestly stepped forward. In the last year he had grown less inclined to that kind of fun. The men took hold of each other, collar and elbow. They parried with their feet for an instant. Suddenly Abe's long right leg caught itself behind the left knee of the minister. It was the hip

lock as they called it those days. Once secured the stronger man was almost sure to prevail and quickly. The sturdy circuit rider stood against it for a second until Abe sprang his bow. Then the heels of the former flew upward and his body came down to the grass, back first.

"That ar done popped my wind bag," said the minister as he got up.

"Call in," said John McNell and the others echoed it.

"I call in Samson Traylor," said the minister.

At last the thing which had long been a subject of talk and argument in the stores and houses of New Salem was about to come to pass—a trial of strength and agility between the two great lions of Sangamon county. Either of them would have given a month's work to avoid it.

"Now we shall see which is the son of Peleus and which the son of Telemon," Kelo shouted.

"How shall we raffle?" Samson asked.

"I don't care," said Abe.

"Rough and tumble," Ferguson proposed.

Both men agreed. They bent low intently watching each other, their great hands outreaching. They stood braced for a second and suddenly both sprang forward. Their shoulders came together with a thud. It was like two big bison bulls hurling their weight in the first shock of battle. For a breath each bore with all his strength and then closed with his adversary. Each had an under hold with one arm, the other hooked around a shoulder. Samson lifted Abe from his feet but the latter with tremendous efforts loosened the hold of the Vermont, and regained the turf. They struggled across the dooryard, the ground trembling beneath their feet. They went against the side of the house, shaking it with the force of their impact. Samson had broken the grip of one of Abe's hands and now had his feet in the air again but the young giant clung to hip and shoulder and wriggled back to his foothold. Those lesser men were thrilled and a little frightened by the mighty struggle. Knowing the strength of the wrestlers they felt a fear of broken bones. Each had torn a rent in the coat of the other. If they kept on there was danger that both would be stripped. The children had begun to cry. Sarah begged the struggling men to stop and they obeyed her.

"If any of you fellers think that's fun you can have my place," said Abe. "Samson, I declare you elected the strongest man in this county. You've got the muscle of a grizzly bear. I'm glad to be quit o' ye."

"It ain't a fair election, Abe," Samson laughed. "If you were ruffling for the right you could flop me. This little brush was nothing. Your heart wasn't in it, and by thunder, Abe, when it comes to havin' fun I rather guess we'd both do better to let each other alone."

"Tain't exactly good amusement, not for us," Abe agreed.

It was growing dark. Ann Rutledge arrived on her pony, and called Abe aside and told him that the raiders were in the village and were breaking the windows of Radford's store because he had refused to sell them liquor.

"Don't say anything about it," Abe cautioned her. "Just go into the house with Sarah Traylor and sit down and have a good visit. We'll look after the raiders."

Then Abe told Samson what was up. The men concealed themselves in some bushes by the roadside while the minister sat close against an end of the house with his bloodhound beside him. Before they were settled in their places they heard the regulators coming. There were eight men in the party according to Abe's count as they passed. The men, in concealment, hurried to the cabin and surrounded it, crouched against the walls. In a moment they could see a big spot, blacker than the darkness, moving toward them. It was the massed raiders. They came on with the stealth of a cat nearing its prey. A lionlike roar broke the silence. The preacher's bloodhound leaped forward. The waiting men sprang to their feet and charged. The raiders turned and ran, pell mell, in a panic toward their horses. Suddenly the darkness seemed to fill with moving figures. One of the fleeing men, whose coat tails the dog had seized, was yelling for help. The minister rescued him and the dog went on roaring after the others.

When the New Salemites got to the edge of the grove they could hear a number of regulators climbing into the treetops. Samson had a man in each hand; Abe had another, while Harry Needles and Alexander Ferguson were in possession of the man whom the dog had captured. The minister was out in the grove with his bloodhound that was barking and growling under a tree. Jack Kelo arrived with a lantern. One of Samson's captives began swearing and struggling to get away. Samson gave him a little shake and bade him be quiet. The man uttered a cry of fear and pain and offered no more resistance. Stephen Nuckles came out of the grove.

"The rest o' that ar party done gone upstairs to roost," said the minister. "I reckon my dog'll keep 'em thar. We better jest tote these men inter the house an' have a prayin' bee. I've got a right smart good chanet, now, to whop ol Satan."

They moved the raiders' horses. Then the party—save Harry Needles, who stayed in the grove to keep watch—took its captives into the cabin. Three of them were boys from eighteen to twenty years of age. The other was a lanky, bearded Tennes-

sean some forty years' old. One or the young lads had hurt his hand in the evening's frolic. Blood was dripping from it. The four sat silent and fearful and ashamed.

Sarah made tea and put it with meat and milk and dohchnuts and bread and butter on the table for them. Samson washed and bandaged the boy's wound. The captives ate as if they were hungry, while the minister went out to feed his dog. When the men had finished eating Samson offered them tobacco. The oldest man filled his pipe and lighted it with a coal. Not one of the captives had said a word until this tall Tennessean remarked after his pipe was going:

"Thankee, mister. You done been right good to us."



Suddenly the Darkness Seemed to Fill With Moving Figures."

"Who told you to come here?" Samson demanded.

"Twere a man from St. Louis. He done said you hated the South an' were holpin' niggers to run away."

"And he offered to pay you to come here and burn this house and run Traylor out of the county, didn't he?" Abe asked.

"He did—yes, suh—he suah did," answered the man—like a child in his ignorance and simplicity.

"I thought so," Abe rejoined. "You tackled a big job, my friend. Did you

know that every one of you could be sent to prison for a term of years, and I've a good mind to see that you go there. You men have got to begin right now to behave yourselves mighty proper or you'll begin to sup sorrow."

Stephen Nuckles returned as Abe was speaking.

"You jest leave 'em to me, Mr. Lincoln," he said. "These be good men, but ol' Satan done got his hooks on 'em. Mis' Traylor, ef you don't mind, I be goin' to do a job o' prayin' right now. Men, you jest git down on yo' knees right hyar along o' me."

It is recorded later in the diary that the rude Shepherd of the prairies

worked with these men on their farms for weeks until he had them wanted to the fold.

(To be continued)

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